

**PRESS RELEASE**



# The Cleveland Museum of Art

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KANDINSKY WATERCOLORS: A SELECTION FROM THE SOLOMON R. GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM AND THE HILLA VON REBAY FOUNDATION OPENS JULY 21 AT THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

Fifty major watercolors by the pioneer of abstract painting, Vasily Kandinsky, will be on view at The Cleveland Museum of Art from July 21 through September 27, 1981. The paintings, on loan from The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and The Hilla von Rebay Foundation, two of the richest collections of Kandinsky's work in the United States, date from 1911 to 1940 and represent virtually every phase of his art. Kandinsky Watercolors is supported by a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. The Cleveland showing is assisted by a grant from the Ohio Arts Council.

Kandinsky was born in Russia in 1866. At the age of thirty he left his law practice to study painting in Munich. There, between 1908 and 1914, he made his most original and important contributions to modern painting and aesthetic theory. His early work was representational. Gradually, and to some extent echoing the innovations of the contemporary French painters called "Fauves" (wild beasts), Kandinsky began experimenting with the expressive possibilities of form and color. Then, in what Thomas Messer, director of The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, calls "the most radical departure in the history of 20th-century art," Kandinsky proclaimed the independence of color and form from recognizable subject matter. Contemporary artists such as Piet Mondrian, Kazimir Malevich, Frantisek Kupka, and Robert Delaunay were also experimenting with abstraction, but Kandinsky's inventiveness and originality, and the authority and strength of his work, made him a leader in the modernist movement.

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In 1914, at the outbreak of World War I, Kandinsky returned to Russia, where he worked for the new revolutionary government organizing cultural institutions based on modern ideas. By 1921, the Soviet government had become hostile to modern art and Kandinsky left his homeland, bound for Germany. In 1922 he accepted a teaching position at the newly established Bauhaus, the school of visual and social experiment created in Weimar by the architect Walter Gropius. The Nazis closed the Bauhaus in 1933, forcing Kandinsky to leave Germany to find refuge in Paris, where he worked until his death in 1944.

The Baroness Hilla Rebay von Ehrenwiesen was a German artist and passionate advocate and collector of non-objective art who played a key role in the growth of the Guggenheim collection of modern art. She met Solomon Guggenheim and his wife Irene in 1927 and introduced them, not only to the avant-garde art she greatly admired, but also to some of the artists whom she knew. In 1929 Miss Rebay met Kandinsky; it was the beginning of a warm friendship and she became a patron of his work. In the same year she brought the Guggenheims to Kandinsky's studio at the Bauhaus and they purchased an oil painting from him. Guided by Miss Rebay's enthusiasm and assistance, the Guggenheims acquired, within ten years, a sizable number of works by modern artists, including Léger and Klee, but especially Kandinsky.

In 1937 Solomon Guggenheim established a foundation to administer a collection of paintings which in 1939 were put on public view in the Museum of Non-Objective Painting. Miss Rebay served as the Museum's curator and director from its inception until 1952, when the Museum, renamed The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, shifted its focus from non-objective paintings to the whole spectrum of 20th-century art. At this time Miss Rebay withdrew her personal collection to her estate at Green Farms, Connecticut. At her death in 1967, she bequeathed her collection and archives to The Hilla von Rebay Foundation, which is dedicated

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### 3-kandinsky watercolors

to non-objective art. In 1974 an agreement was made to deposit her collection with the Guggenheim Museum for an indefinite period, and in 1977, the Museum collaborated with the Rebay Foundation on a project which led to the present traveling exhibition.

Kandinsky Watercolors is installed in the prints and drawings galleries on the Museum's ground floor. The catalog for the exhibition, prepared by Louise Averill Svendsen and Vivian Endicott Barnett of the Guggenheim Museum (available at the Museum Sales Desk for \$9.95), contains a scholarly analysis by Mrs. Barnett of Kandinsky's watercolor techniques and the relationship of his works on paper to his oils. Mrs. Barnett will lecture on Kandinsky's watercolors at the Museum on Sunday, September 20, at 3:30 p.m.

Gallery talks on Kandinsky's watercolors will be given on Wednesday, July 29, and Sunday, August 2, at 1:30 p.m., with a special talk for the hearing impaired scheduled on Tuesday, September 1, at 1:30 p.m. As part of the Museum's July Wednesday Evening Festivals, on July 29, at 8:00 p.m. Marianne Doezema, assistant curator in the Museum's Department of Art History and Education, will give a lecture in the Recital Hall on "Kandinsky Watercolors: Cosmic Sounds." Also on July 29 a 30-minute film, Kandinsky and the Bauhaus, will be shown in the Lecture Hall at 12:30, 5:30, and 7:00 p.m.

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For additional information or photographs, please contact the Public Relations Office, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340.